

Race, Gender, Class, Ethnicity (Credits: 4)

Sociology 106 Spring 2026; M/W 2:30-3:45p; Location: ILC S231 (note new location as of 1/22/26)

Professor Mark C. Pachucki, Ph.D., mpachucki@umass.edu

Weekly student hours (934 Thompson): to be arranged at class

Overview/learning objectives: This course is a general introduction to the discipline of Sociology through the lens of core dimensions of social life that both unite and divide groups in society, sometimes at the same time. Your job as a member of the class is to be relentlessly curious about how the social world “works” (and doesn’t work!). We’ll explore a core argument of this course that there is more that unites us than divides us, and that many divisions, in part, may come from a lack of social connection in society. This term we have the following goals:

1. To introduce you to contemporary theory and evidence around core topics of diversity, including at least race, gender, sexuality and class in the US.
2. To introduce you to sociological practice through an examination of how sociologists investigate the world and prominent theoretical explanations.
3. To learn how social science theories can help you/us explain and analyze diverse social, cultural, and political perspectives, particularly those that are not your own.
4. To introduce you to a series of contemporary social issues with an introduction to past sociological research on the substantive topic and contemporary debates.
5. To demonstrate an awareness of how individual perspectives and biases may influence your own and others’ thinking and behaviors.
6. To gain knowledge of structural and cultural forces that shape or have shaped discrimination based on multiple social statuses, such as race, ethnicity, language, religion, class, ability, nationality, sexuality, or gender.
7. To learn how to put yourself in other people’s shoes and how to constructively disagree.

Bonus goals: You should leave this course with an ability to think critically about how the social world that surrounds us affects your life – and how you affect the life of others in the tapestry of society that we’re continually weaving together. But equally important is to develop skills *that transfer beyond this course*: a) evaluating evidence about scientific claims, b) interpreting different kinds of data c) writing & reflecting about social science research, and d) learning about and engaging with viewpoints you may not agree with. A more surreptitious goal (oops!) is to convince to you to become a sociology major if you’re not one already – or if not, to at least have a healthy respect for how sociological thinking can help you be a more critical thinker in college and beyond.

Grading. This course uses Canvas, and it will reward consistent engagement with the material and with your classmates. Letter grades will be used (A: 93-100, A-: 90-92.9, B+: 87-89.9, B: 83-86.9, B-: 80-82.9; C+: 77-79.9; C: 73-76.9; C-: 70-72.9; D+: 67-69.9, D: 60-66.9, F: 0-59.9). You have multiple ways to excel; the grade consists of: 25% weekly quizzes & notecards; 30% exams; 30% written assignments; 15% engagement activities. For written assignments, a full number grade (0-10) will be deducted for every day it’s turned in late. There is no grading curve.

You’re lucky to go to college in Massachusetts at our flagship public university, for many reasons! One reason you may not have thought of is that this course might not be offered at public universities in several states (like [TX](#) and [FL](#)) due to its content. We’ll talk more about why.

Prerequisites. You are only expected to come to class *having read* the material so we can talk about it. There are no formal prereqs besides an active curiosity for the topics; a willingness to engage with material from across the social sciences (mostly sociology). You'll encounter a diverse set of ideas that we hope will challenge and stretch your thinking in new ways.

Readings/Media. The material has been selected to be accessible but thought-provoking – staying on top of the readings and engaging in class will help you get the most out of class. PDFs of readings and links to media are available on Canvas. The library also has physical reserves for 4-hour checkout windows.

(1) REQUIRED BOOKS. (<\$35 for the term!)

- *A Sociology Experiment*. Chapters are \$1/chapter; we'll read 4 of them. Link [here – be sure to download and read Chapter 1 \('Introduction'\) in advance of the first class!](#)
- *Racecraft: The Soul of Inequality in American Life* (Karen Fields & Barbara Fields) – available for <\$20 through your favorite bookseller.
- *Lab Girl*. Hope Jahren. <\$15 through your favorite bookseller
- *The Last Human Job*. (Allison Pugh). Our library has [free e-copies](#) of this book, or order from your preferred bookstore.

(2) REQUIRED READINGS/MEDIA (on Canvas):

- Each week there will typically be a small number of pieces (from a scientific journal, newspaper, movie, or podcast) for you to read/listen/watch that will complement and helps to apply some of the key themes in the book chapter. These won't be long and are intended to help you apply some of the themes you're exposed to in the required books.
- *Strong encouragement:* for any material that isn't a book, do yourself a favor and make a course-pack by printing out the optional .PDF packet of any other readings so that you can mark up and highlight them. Such annotations tend to be easier to retrieve, to bring to class, and will likely serve your learning processes better than digitally marking up a .pdf. (Do you want to be staring at a screen more than you absolutely have to?)

What we expect of you:

Attendance. Bluntly, attendance is expected. We won't be grading for attendance, but know that all material covered in lectures – and some of it supplements the reading material – will be on the exams. It's *your* responsibility to obtain notes/material from a classmate or come see us in office hours. Emails to TAs or Professor that ask “*what did I miss?*” will still be answered, but will be deprioritized. Slides will be posted on Canvas after each class, but make a few friends as well. Get in touch with us if you have extenuating circumstances that make attendance difficult, and we can try to find a solution.

Weekly quizzes (15%) and Notecards (10%). Starting in Week 2, there will be one two-question quiz in class per week (randomly, one of our two sessions), and one review notecard due per week (your choice of day M-F for that week, due no later than Fr 1159p). Preparing a review notecard for yourself which you then upload to Canvas is not for us – it's intended to help you organize and summarize your thinking on each week's themes. Quiz grading: 0-5 Notecard grading: Missing (0), Not strong (1) / Satisfactory (2). We will drop your lowest quiz, and your lowest notecard.

Response Papers (30%). There will be two of these guided responses spread throughout the term (#1: due Wed 3/4 (race/ethnicity); #2: you have choice - *either* Wed 4/8 (on the topic of social status/class) or 4/24 (gender). Your task will be to write a short (800-word, double spaced, 12pt font) response statement that reacts to a prompt that we give you at least 2 weeks prior. Your response should draw upon material from class (chapters/ articles/ podcast/ other media source) and offers some of your original thoughts. Typically, you will be asked to take a position and back it up with evidence from the class. Graded 0-10 on argument, organization, evidence, addressing the prompt. You are asked to print/staple a hard copy and bring to class, and also upload a file as a backup to Canvas. Plan ahead!

Exams (30%)

- a) Exam 1 (15%). This in-class exam on Wed, March 11 will be multiple-choice and short answers intended to test your grasp of key ideas from lectures/readings during the 1st part. Graded 0-100.
- b) Exam 2 (15%) during reading/exam week (time/date TBD) will be weighted towards material from the 2nd half lectures & readings. Graded 0-100.

Engagement activities (15%). During the semester, there will be one in-person and two short online activities.

- The in-person engagement activity is to go to either your TA or Professor's student hours in the first 3 weeks of class! During this 10-minute meeting, we're going to want to know why you picked this class given where you're at in college, and what you hope to get out of it. This is a big class and we hope to get to know each of you more. It helps us be better instructors if we can put names with faces, learn more about your interests, and most of all, if there are ways that we can help you learn. Graded: Missing (0), Attended (1).
- The two short online activities will take place one before spring break, and one in the second half of the term. They'll be announced a week ahead of time, you'll have up to a week to complete them, and they shouldn't take longer than 30m each. Graded: Missing (0), Not strong (1) / Satisfactory (2).

Missed work: From the university's academic regulations:

"Students absent due to extenuating circumstances-including jury duty, military obligations, scheduled activities for other classes, the death of a family member, or verifiable health-related incapacity-remain responsible for meeting all class requirements and contacting the faculty member in a timely fashion about making up missed work. Faculty shall offer such students reasonable assistance in making up missed classes (i.e., making arrangements for attendance at labs or discussion sections which meet at other times; providing makeup exams or labs where feasible or offer mutually agreeable alternatives to make up work)."

If you need to miss a regular class, you'll be offered a makeup quiz opportunity in your TA's or my office hours. In the case of serious extenuating events that might prompt you to miss an exam, we're likely to coordinate with you and your Academic Dean to ensure that we're helping to support you holistically. No make-up work will be accepted past last class (Wed, 5/6).

Class norms: We're going to be encouraging you to step away from your screens as much as you possibly can in this course. This means asking you to limit laptop/phone use in class except for very specific activities that we'll mention in class. Our sessions together have been designed as interactive and discussion-based. It's going to sound old-fashioned, but taking notes, asking questions, and reviewing notes are the best predictors of *deep learning* in college coursework. We're happy to point you toward numerous pieces of research that show this to be the case.

What you can expect from the teaching staff:

To help co-create a constructive learning environment. This means being knowledgeable, prepared, and willing to puzzle through questions prompted by the material. It means helping us to take stock of where we've been each week, and where we're headed the following week. It also means being as responsive to your concerns as we can.

To be available to you outside of class. We've spread student office hours across the week, and Prof. Pachucki will take a short poll during the first week to set student office hours according to what works best for **your** schedules. *This is because we want this time to be helpful for you.* Sometimes we'll hold them at Prof. Pachucki's office (Thompson 934), and other times around campus. If you email, you can usually expect a response from us within 24h. Prof. Pachucki checks email about 2x/day during the week.

To be transparent and clear about how you are being evaluated during the term. We want you to be apprised at all times about how you're doing in the class. This syllabus gives you an overview of how your grade is calculated, and we'll update the gradebook weekly. You can check your grade at any time on the Canvas website. If you prefer, you can also use a grade calculator spreadsheet in the "class documents" folder on Canvas so you can forecast what your grade will be if you were to get a [X] grade on assignment [Y].

Open inquiry policy: This course asks you to be a proactive and respectful communicator in class as well as in your written work. We take the position that while classrooms should be a place of physical and psychological safety, they needn't be a place of intellectual comfort – we all should be challenged to expand our thinking. Learning to appreciate perspectives you may disagree with, taking risks, and embracing uncertainty are all key to our growth as thinkers. There are no ideas that are off-limits in the classroom – however, open inquiry isn't an open invitation to be disrespectful or hateful. If you say something in that spirit, you should expect that there'll be a consequence of us (and possibly your peers) pushing back. Having an unpopular opinion will never be tied to your grade; your work will be evaluated on metrics like the rigor of arguments, the quality of evidence, and the organization/coherence of writing according to rubrics that accompany the assignments.

Teaching Assistants

Stefanie Robles / srobles@umass.edu
Office Hours: Wed 12-2 / Location Thompson 824
Student last names A – M

Choonhee Woo / cwoo@soc.umass.edu
Hours: M 1-2 / Location Thompson 824
Student last names T - Z

Monica Benros DeBarros / mbenrosdebar@umass.edu
Office Hours: Fr 1-2 / Location Thompson 902
Student last names N – S

We prefer email contact for routine questions, and to use office hours for more in-depth conversations. See the "*Frequently Asked Questions*" handout posted to the webpage for other common questions. Email contacts should be made to your assigned Teaching Assistant.

Spring 2026 Sociology 106 At a Glance

Feb. 2 & 4	Week 1.	Social connection, Part I
Feb 9 & 11	Week 2.	Race & Ethnicity, Part I
Feb 18 & 19 (Thurs*)	Week 3.	Race & Ethnicity, Part II <i>(*no class Monday, 2/16 – President’s Day. Thursday follows Monday’s schedule.)</i>
Feb 23 & 25	Week 4.	Race & Ethnicity, Part III
March 2 & 4	Week 5.	Race & Ethnicity, Part IV 1 st Response paper due in class Wed, March 4
March 9 & 11	Week 6.	Intersectionality (Mon) In-class Exam 1 (Wed)
March 16 & 18 (Week 7. SPRING BREAK – no class.)		
March 23 & 25	Week 8.	Social status & class, Part I
March 30 & April 1	Week 9.	Social status & class, Part II
April 6 & 8	Week 10.	Social status & class, Part III 2 nd response paper due in class Wed, April 8 (option 1)
April 13 & 15	Week 11.	Gender, Part I
April 22 & 24(Fri*)	Week 12.	Gender, Part II 2 nd response paper due in class Fri, April 24 (option 2) <i>(*no class Monday, 4/20 – Patriot’s Day. Friday will follow a Monday schedule)</i>
April 27 & 29	Week 13.	Gender, Part III
May 4 & 6	Week 14.	Social Connection, Part II
May 11-15 (location/time TBD) – Exam #2 during finals week		

Weekly Readings/Videos/Media

Week	Theme	For Monday	For Wednesday	Why?
1	Social connection, Part I	<p><i>A Sociology Experiment: Introduction (pp. 1-34)</i></p> <p>“Science keeps changing. So why should we trust it?” 2026/1/5. New York Times. Elay Shech.</p>	<p><i>The Last Human Job, Ch 1-2: Introduction & The Value of Seeing the Other</i></p> <p>In-class activity: meet & greet in grading sections with instructor & TAs.</p>	<p>We start and end here because we’re all connected to one another. A strong scientific foundation comes out of a willingness to engage with ideas, to be skeptical, and to be open to having your mind changed. What are the consequences of a lack of connection in society?</p>
2	Race & Ethnicity I	<p><i>A Sociology Experiment: Race and Ethnicity</i></p>	<p>a) <i>Racecraft, Ch1: “A Tour of Racecraft”</i></p> <p>b) Nelson, Alondra. “The social life of DNA: racial reconciliation and institutional morality after the genome.” (2018): 522-37.</p>	<p>What’s useful about how sociologists think and write about the concepts of race and ethnicity? We often hear that “race is a social construct”, but It’s more than that – what else does race mean?</p>
3	Race & Ethnicity II	<p>a) <i>Racecraft, Ch 2: “Individual Stories and America’s Collective Past”</i></p> <p>b) Anderson, Elijah. “The white space.” <i>Sociology of race and ethnicity</i> 1, no. 1 (2015): 10-21.</p>	<p>a) <i>Racecraft, Ch 3: “Of rogues and geldings”</i></p> <p>b) Jefferson, T. Notes on the state of Virginia (1787), “Query 18”p248-50</p> <p>c) The Federalist Papers No. 42 & 54 (James Madison)</p> <p>d) Johnson, Katherine. "Navigating the Hypervisibility and Invisibility of Mixed-Race Families." (2024): 18-23.</p>	<p>What role does storytelling play in thinking sociologically? How did the way our constitution’s framers thought about race both reflect and embed race in founding documents?</p>

4	Race & Ethnicity III	<p>a) <i>Racecraft, Ch 4: "Slavery, Race, and Ideology in the United States of America"</i></p> <p>b) "Why American Prisons Owe Their Cruelty to Slavery" (Bryan Stevenson, The 1619 Project/NYTimes)</p>	<p>McCarthy, Danielle. "Gendered anti-blackness, maternal health & chattel slavery: OB/Gyn knowledge as a determinant of death of black women." (2024).</p> <p>b) The Data Visualizations of W.E.B. Du Bois.</p>	What does it mean to say that race is <i>ideological</i> ? How does it connect to slavery?
5	Race & Ethnicity IV	<p>a) Bonilla-Silva, Eduardo. 1997. "Rethinking racism: Toward a structural interpretation." pp.465-80.</p> <p>b) Maghbouleh, Neda. "Twenty-five years of Charles Mills's Racial Contract in sociology." pp. 433-442.</p>	<p><i>Racecraft, "Conclusion: Racecraft and inequality"</i></p> <p>Slocum, R. 2011. "Race in the study of food." Progress in Human Geography. 303-27.</p>	What does it mean that racism is 'structural'? What is the 'racial contract' as philosopher Charles Mills describes it? How does ongoing racism feed into a multitude of inequalities?
6	Intersectionality	<p>a) Collins, Patricia Hill. 2015. "Intersectionality's definitional dilemmas." pp.1-20.</p> <p>b) Frederick, Angela, and Dara Shifrer. "Race and disability: From analogy to intersectionality." <i>Sociology of Race and Ethnicity</i> 5, no. 2 (2019): 200-214.</p>	Exam 1 (in class)	What does it mean to think "intersectionally"? How do differences in ability interact with differences in race/ethnicity, class, and gender?
7	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Spring break no class</i></p>			

8	Social Status & Class Week I	<i>A Sociology Experiment: Social Class, Inequality, and Poverty</i>	<p>a) Podcast: "Are Rich People Bad?" (Ep. 1 of Classy", 48m)</p> <p>b) Jack, Anthony Abraham. "(No) harm in asking: Class, acquired cultural capital, & academic engagement at an elite university." pp.1-19</p>	One of the fundamental mechanisms through which human (and many animal) societies are organized is a status-based system where some individuals become ranked higher or lower. What implications does this have for we live our lives?
9	Social Status & Class II	Film: The Divide (2015, Kanopy streaming via UMass library, 1h20m)	Hua Hsu. (9/02/19). " Student Debt is Transforming the American Family. " The New Yorker.	How do wealth inequalities manifest in changes in how we live our lives?
10	Social Status & Class III	Link, Bruce G., and Jo Phelan. 1995. "Social Conditions As Fundamental Causes of Disease." 80–94.	Ye, Yiwan, and Xiaoling Shu. 2025. "Unequal but widespread despairs: Social inequalities and self-rated health trends in the United States in 1972–2018."	How do education differences (a form of ranking and an unequal opportunity) – translate into societal inequalities in health?
11	Gender I	<i>A sociology experiment: Gender and Sexuality</i>	Winer, Canton. "Does Everyone Have a Gender? Compulsory Gender, Gender Detachment, and Asexuality." <i>Socius</i> 11 (2025).	What differentiates sex from gender? How is gender "produced", and what is the "gender gap" in American society? How is sexuality tied to social control and how has its meaning changed over time? What are social implications of inequalities in sexuality and gender expression?

12	Gender II (Patriot's Day week – note different class days!)	<p>WEDNESDAY:</p> <p>(a) Ispa-Landa, Simone, and Barbara J. Risman. "The gender revolution on Greek row." <i>Contexts</i> 20(3) (2021): 16-21.</p> <p>(b) Khan, Shamus R., Jennifer S. Hirsch, Alexander Wamboldt, and Claude A. Mellins. "'I Didn't Want To Be 'That Girl'': The Social Risks of Labeling, Telling, and Reporting Sexual Assault." <i>Sociological Science</i> 5 (2018): 432-460</p>	<p>FRIDAY: a) Pirtle, Whitney N., and Tashelle Wright. 2021. "Structural Gendered Racism Revealed in Pandemic Times: Intersectional Approaches to Understanding Race and Gender Health Inequities in COVID-19." <i>pp.168–79</i></p> <p>b) Video on gender wage gaps: Black Women's 'Double Gap' in Wages. (15m, Institute for New Economic Thinking)</p>	How does gender play out on campus? How does gender and race intersect in the workplace? How does gender intersect with racism during crises?
13	Gender III	<i>Lab Girl, Chs 1-6</i>	<i>The Last Human Job, Chs 7-Epilogue</i>	How does gender "work" in STEM? How does it not? What consequences do gender inequities in science have? What are some possible solutions?
14	Social Connection II	<p>a) <i>The Last Human Job, Ch7: Connecting Across Difference</i></p> <p>b) Pachucki, Mark C., Anthony Paik. 2023. "Ditching a friend who is not like you can deepen social inequality." <i>The Conversation</i>.</p>	<p>a) <i>The Last Human Job, Ch9: Choosing Connection</i></p> <p>b) Shaer, Matthew. 2024. "Why is the loneliness epidemic so hard to cure?" <i>New York Times</i> 8/27/24.</p> <p>c) Fischer, Claude. "The myth of the loneliness epidemic." Nov. 2024</p>	What do connection and loneliness have to do with how we think about race, class, gender, and social status?
Finals week: Exam #2 at a date/time to be announced by the registrar's office. When it hits SPIRE, we will let you know.				

Academic Honesty Statement: Since the integrity of the academic enterprise of any institution of higher education requires honesty in scholarship and research, academic honesty is required of all students at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. Academic dishonesty is prohibited in all programs of the University. Academic dishonesty includes but is not limited to: cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, and facilitating dishonesty. Appropriate sanctions may be imposed on any student who has committed an act of academic dishonesty. Instructors should take reasonable steps to address academic misconduct. Any person who has reason to believe that a student has committed academic dishonesty should bring such information to the attention of the appropriate course instructor as soon as possible. Instances of academic dishonesty not related to a specific course should be brought to the attention of the appropriate department Head or Chair. Since students are expected to be familiar with this policy and the commonly accepted standards of academic integrity, ignorance of such standards is not normally sufficient evidence of lack of intent. (http://www.umass.edu/dean_students/codeofconduct/acadhonesty/)

Generative AI policy: In terms of the above clause that “other sources of information or knowledge be appropriately credited”, please be advised that AI-generated content is severely frowned upon in this course, though there is a rich debate about its place in our society and in academia. Here’s the ultimate position of this course: (a) your engagement with and understanding of the material is one of the primary ways for you to learn about the world; I want to read *your* thoughts, not a computer’s thoughts; (b) a major objective of college is to help launch you into independence and the workforce. Part of that process is making mistakes and learning from them. We know from recent studies that GenAI gets things wrong up to 40-60% of the time.

Accommodation Statement: The University of Massachusetts Amherst is committed to providing an equal educational opportunity for all students. If you have a documented physical, psychological, or learning disability on file with Disability Services (DS), you may be eligible for reasonable academic accommodations to help you succeed in this course. If you have a documented disability that requires an accommodation, please notify me within the first two weeks of the semester so that we may make appropriate arrangements. For further information, please visit Disability Services (<https://www.umass.edu/disability/>)

Title IX Statement: In accordance with Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 that prohibits gender-based discrimination in educational settings that receive federal funds, the University of Massachusetts Amherst is committed to providing a safe learning environment for all students, free from all forms of discrimination, including sexual assault, sexual harassment, domestic violence, dating violence, stalking, and retaliation. This includes interactions in person or online through digital platforms and social media. Title IX also protects against discrimination on the basis of pregnancy, childbirth, false pregnancy, miscarriage, abortion, or related conditions, including recovery. There are resources here on campus to support you. A summary of the available Title IX resources (confidential and non-confidential) can be found at the following link: <https://www.umass.edu/titleix/resources> . You do not need to make a formal report to access them. If you need immediate support, you are not alone. Free and confidential support is available 24 hours a day / 7 days a week / 365 days a year at the SASA Hotline 413-545-0800.

Department of Sociology Statement of Values

The Department of Sociology at the University of Massachusetts Amherst is committed to creating and maintaining an inclusive and equitable department. We ask that all members of the Sociology community -- faculty, staff, and students -- be mindful of our responsibility to create an environment that is welcoming to all, and where each person feels accepted, included, seen, heard, valued, and safe. We recognize that learning how to be inclusive and respectful is an iterative process and sometimes we all act in imperfect ways. As sociologists, we are aware that we are all inheritors of systems of inequality, whether to our advantage or our disadvantage. We also acknowledge that we each are privileged in various ways. We strive to create safe spaces to encourage productive dialogue with the goal of learning from our mistakes and changing for the better.

We strive for excellence in all we do. True excellence requires each individual to be able to work and learn in an atmosphere of respect, dignity, and acceptance. Our commitment to equity and inclusion requires each of us to continuously ensure that our interactions are respectful. We recognize that marginalized groups of people have unique experiences in the Pioneer Valley and within the larger society. We are committed to making our department a place that counteracts, to the best of our abilities, those processes of marginalization, and that inspires academic freedom and creativity.

Whenever and wherever possible, our department will affirm this commitment to values that oppose racism, sexism, homophobia, xenophobia, transphobia, classism, and hatred based on religious identity publicly and explicitly. As a department dedicated to social justice, we will take very seriously reports, formal or informal, of harassment and discrimination. We will make every effort to ensure that this commitment manifests in our department's policies, programs, and practices. In the Department of Sociology, we:

- Value equity, inclusion, and dignity for all.
- Insist on a culture of respect and recognize that words and actions matter. The absence of action and words also matter.
- Encourage respectful expression of ideas and perspectives.
- Will not tolerate sexism, racism, homophobia, transphobia, xenophobia, and other overt and covert forms of prejudice and discrimination.
- Share in the responsibility to create a positive culture and to safeguard equity, inclusion, dignity, respect, and safety for all. Each member of our community - faculty, staff, and students - should be a role model for others.
- Will take action when we observe people being treated unfairly or in a demeaning manner.
- Envision and strive to foster an inclusive, welcoming department.